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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: MODERATE IRPT DEPUTY REFUSES PARTY CHAIRMANSHIP

CLASSIFIED BY: HOAGLAND, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan's (IRPT) First Deputy Chairman, Muhiddin Kabiri refused to accept the party's chairmanship. Kabiri told PolOff at the Embassy's July 4th celebration that the party's current chairman, Said Abdullo Nuri, asked Kabiri to be the next IRPT head, but Kabiri declined citing that he is too moderate and does not have Nuri's popular appeal. Nuri has been suffering from stomach cancer and Kabiri suggested that he only has 2-3 years to live, optimistically. Kabiri claimed that he is comfortable in his position as the First Deputy Chairman and is confident that the party will be able to find someone else to lead them.

¶2. (C) Kabiri firmly believes that President Rahmonov does not want him to be IRPT chairman. Rahmonov has already approached Nuri and asked him to select someone who is religiously conservative. Kabiri said that Rahmonov would like to see an "extremist" lead the IPRT, insinuating that Rahmonov wants to appoint someone who would polarize the party. Thus far, Nuri has refused Rahmonov's advice.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Rahmonov's advice to appoint a religious conservative as IRPT chairman would serve his own political interests. If an Islamic conservative were to lead the party, it would further divide the party into a moderate wing and religiously conservative faction, thereby weakening the IRPT, the strongest of the political parties not viewed to be a government creation. Rahmonov's reported suggestion to Nuri is out of character with government statements decrying religious extremism. With the appointment of an extremist, it could give the government greater ammunition to use against the IRPT and

more excuses to crackdown on the party's activities. With the party's leadership uncertain, there is a danger that Central Asia's only legally recognized Islamic political party will be in jeopardy.

14. (C) COMMENT CONT'D: Kabiri has also received pressure from other quarters. Kabiri told DCM that Mayor of Dushanbe and Head of Parliament, Ubaidolloyev pointedly asked Kabiri if he met with President Bush during Kabiri's trip to the United States to plot a "color revolution." From the Embassy's perspective, it is a shame the talented and articulate Kabiri has removed himself from the higher stakes political game. He has always been a transparent and forthcoming leader. That said, we do not believe his political career is over. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND